

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."—SHAKESPEARE.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

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HALF A MILLION OF MONEY.

BY THE AUTHOR OF "BARBARA'S HISTORY."

CHAPTER XXIX. THE RICH MISS HATHERTON.

AN evening party at Castletowers was a momentous affair. It involved a good deal of expense, and a vast amount of anxiety; for the hereditary coffers were ever but scantily furnished, and the hereditary hospitality had to be kept up at any cost. How some of Lady Castletowers' few but elegant entertainments were paid for, was a secret known only to her son and herself. Sometimes an oak or two was felled in some remote corner of the park; or the Earl denied himself a horse; or the carriage was left unrenovated for half a year longer; or her ladyship magnanimously sacrificed her own brief visit to London in the season. Anyhow, these extra expenses were certain to be honourably met, in such a manner that only the givers of the feast were inconvenienced by it.

On the present occasion, however, Lord Castletowers had been compelled to apply to his solicitor for an advance upon his next half-yearly receipts; and when William Trefalden went down that Thursday morning to see his cousin Saxon, he brought with him a cheque for the Earl. The party was fixed for the following evening; but Mr. Trefalden could not be prevailed upon to stay for it. He was obliged, he said, to go back to town that same night by the last train; and he did go back (after making himself very pleasant at dinner), with Saxon's signature in his pocket-book.

It was a very brilliant party, consisting for the most part of county magnates, with a sprinkling of military, and a valuable reinforcement of dancing men from town. Among the magnates were Viscount and Lady Esher, a stately couple of the old school, who, being much too dignified to travel by railway, drove over with four horses from Esher Court, a distance of eighteen miles, and remained at Castletowers for the night. The Viscount was lord-lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of the county, and had once held office for three weeks as President of the Board of Perquisites; a fact to which he was never weary of alluding. There, too, were Sir Alexander and Lady Hankley, with their five marriageable daughters; the Bishop of Betchworth and Mrs. Bunyon; Mr. Walkingshaw of Aylsham, one of the richest commoners in England, with

Lady Arabella Walkingshaw, his wife, and their distinguished guest, Miss Hatherton of Penzance, whose father had begun life as a common miner, and ended it with a fortune of two hundred and fifty thousand pounds. These, together with Lord Boxhill; His Responsibility Prince Quartz Potz, the Prussian Envoy; a few local baronets and their families; an ex-secretary of legation; and a number of lesser stars, parliamentary, clerical, and official, made up the bulk of the assembly. There were also three or four celebrities from the lower paradise of arts and letters—Sir Jones de Robinson, the eminent portrait-painter; Signor Katghutini, the great Dalmatian violinist; Mr. Smythe Browne, the profound author of "Transcendental Eclecticism," and Mrs. Smythe Browne, who wrote that admirable work on "Woman in the Camp, the Council, and the Church"—a very remarkable couple, whose distinguishing characteristics were, that Mrs. Smythe Browne wore short hair and shirt collars, while the sandy locks of Mr. Smythe Browne floated upon his shoulders, and he displayed no vestige of linen whatsoever.

By nine o'clock the guests began to arrive. By ten, the reception-rooms were well filled, and dancing commenced in the great hall. Though rarely thrown open to the light of day, the great hall, with its panellings of dark oak, its carved chimney-piece, its Gothic rafters, and its stands of rusty armour, some of which dated back to the field of Agincourt, was the glory of Castletowers. Brilliantly lighted, decorated with evergreens and flowers, and echoing to the music of a military band, it made such a ball-room as one might vainly seek in any country but our own.

Lady Castletowers received her guests near the door of the first reception-room, looking very stately, and more like Marie Antoinette than ever, in her glitter of old family diamonds. Gracious to all, as a hostess should be, she nevertheless apportioned her civilities according to a complex code of etiquette. The smile with which she greeted Viscount Esher differed by many degrees from that with which she received Sir Jones de Robinson; and the hand extended to Mrs. Smythe Browne was as the hand of an automaton compared with that which met, with a pressure slight yet cordial, the palm of the rich Miss Hatherton.

"But where is the noble savage?" said this latter, surveying the room through her double

eye-glass. "I have heard so much about him, my dear Lady Castletowers, and I dying to see him!"

Miss Hatherton was a tall, handsome young woman of about five or six-and-twenty, with black eyes, fine teeth, a somewhat large, good-natured mouth, and a very decisive manner. She made one of a little privileged knot that was gathered behind Lady Castletowers; and amused herself by criticising the guests as they came up the stairs.

"The noble savage!" repeated Lady Castletowers. "Whom *can* you mean, Miss Hatherton?"

"Whom should I mean, but this young man who has inherited the famous legacy?"

"Mr. Trefalden? Oh, he was here but a few moments ago. There he stands, by the fireplace."

"The Antinous with the golden curls? But, my dear Lady Castletowers, he's absolutely beautiful! And he doesn't look savage at all. I had expected to see a second Orson—a creature clothed in raiment of camel's hair, or the skins of wild beasts. I declare, I am disappointed."

"Mr. Trefalden is a very pleasant person," said Lady Castletowers, with a faint smile. "And very unassuming."

"Is he indeed? Pleasant and unassuming—dear me, how very charming! And so rich, too! Worth millions upon millions, I am told. I used to think myself above the reach of want, at one time; but I feel like a pauper beside him. Who is this stout person now coming up the stairs, covered with as many stars as the celestial globe?"

But before Lady Castletowers could reply, the name of His Responsibility Prince Quartz Potz was thundered forth by the groom of the chambers, and the noble Prussian was bending profoundly over the fair hand of his hostess.

"What a funny little fat man it is!" said the heiress, in her loud way, looking after His Responsibility through her glass, as he passed on towards the adjoining room.

"Prince Quartz Potz, my dear Miss Hatherton, is a highly distinguished person," said Lady Castletowers, greatly shocked.

"Oh yes—I know he is."

"He is distantly connected through his maternal great-grandmother, the Margravine of Saxe-Hohenhausen, with our own Royal Family; and the present Grand-Duchess of Zollenstrasse is his third cousin twice removed."

Miss Hatherton did not seem to be at all impressed by these facts.

"Ah, indeed," said she, indifferently. "And this fine man with a head like a lion—who is he?"

"Mr. Thompson, the member for Silvermere," replied Lady Castletowers, when the gentleman had made his bow and drifted on with the stream.

"What, the great Thompson?—the Thompson who instituted that famous inquiry into the abuses of the Perquisite Office?"

"I do not know what you imply by 'great,' my dear Miss Hatherton," said the Countess, coldly, "but I believe Mr. Thompson's politics are very objectionable."

"Ah, I see you don't like him; but I shall implore you to introduce me, notwithstanding. I have no politics at all, and I admire talent wherever it is to be found. But, in the mean while, I have lost my heart to Antinous, and am longing to dance with him. Do pray make us known, dear Lady Castletowers."

"Upon whom does Miss Hatherton desire to confer the honour of her acquaintance?" asked Lord Castletowers, who happened to come by at the moment. "Can I be of any service?"

"Of the utmost. I want to be introduced to this Mr. Trefalden, about whom all the world has been talking for the last five or six weeks."

"I will perform the office with great pleasure. Will you allow me to hand you to a seat, while I go in search of him?"

"Thanks. And be sure you make him dance with me, Lord Castletowers—I want to dance with him above all things. He *can* dance, I suppose?"

"Of course. How can you ask such a question?"

"Because I have been told that he was a perfect wild man of the woods before he inherited his fortune—couldn't write his name, in fact, six weeks ago, and had never seen a sovereign in his life."

"If you mean that he has not yet been presented at St. James's, you are probably right," replied the Earl, smiling.

"What, a pun, Lord Castletowers? How shocking! I did not believe you capable of such an enormity. But do pray tell me a little truth about your friend; for I dare say I have heard plenty of fiction. Was he not really a barbarian, after all?"

"No more than I am."

"Is it possible?"

"Nor is that all. Saxon Trefalden has plenty of solid learning under those yellow locks of his, Miss Hatherton. He speaks French, Italian, and German with equal facility; he is a first-rate mathematician; and as for his Greek and Latin scholarship, I have known nothing like it since I bade farewell to the dear old professors at Magdalen College."

"Well, you surprise me very much," said Miss Hatherton, "and I cannot deny that I'm disappointed. I had far rather he had been a barbarian, you know. It would have been so very delicious!"

"Perhaps, then, you will be consoled by finding him as unsophisticated as a child. But you shall judge for yourself."

And with this, the Earl installed Miss Hatherton in an easy-chair, and went in search of Saxon. The heiress immediately turned to her nearest neighbour, who happened to be the Bishop of Betchworth, and began a conversation. It was Miss Hatherton's way to be always talking—and somewhat loudly, too.

"What have I done, my lord," said she, "that you have scarcely spoken to me this evening? I have a thousand questions to ask you. I want to know how the renovations are going on; and if you are really to have a stained

oriel, after all. And what are you going to do about that grand carved old screen? I have been told it is past repairing, and cannot possibly be put up again. I hope that's not true."

"I am happy to say that it is not," replied the bishop, who was a very handsome man, and much admired by the ladies of his diocese. "I believe we shall be able to restore the worst parts, and that it will keep its old place for the next two or three centuries. About the east window, I am less hopeful."

"Why so?" asked the heiress.

"I fear we cannot afford it."

"But how is that? I thought there was a large surplus fund in hand."

"There was; but we have found since then that the spire is in a much worse state than we had at first supposed; and to put it into thorough repair will swallow up the whole of our available money."

"Dear, dear, I'm so sorry!" said the heiress. "You really want the stained window. One misses the poetry of colour in Betchworth Cathedral. How much would it cost?"

"More than we could hope to raise after the liberal subscriptions already granted. A thousand pounds."

"So large a sum? Ah, bishop, if I were one of your flock, I should ask leave to put that window in. However, if you like to open a fresh list, you may put me down for two hundred and fifty."

"My dear lady," said the prelate, "what can I say in acknowledgment of such munificence?"

"Only, I beg, that you will try to get the rest of the thousand as quickly as you can. But here comes my partner."

And Miss Hatherton turned to Lord Castletowers, who had found and captured Saxon, and now stood with him beside her chair.

"Will you permit my friend Mr. Trefalden the pleasure of dancing with you, Miss Hatherton?" said he.

"I am delighted to make Mr. Trefalden's acquaintance, and shall be most happy to dance with him," replied the heiress, putting out her hand as cordially and unceremoniously as if Saxon were an old friend already. "What are they doing in the hall now, Lord Castletowers?"

"Finishing a waltz—which will be followed by a quadrille."

"Then we shall be just in time for the quadrille. Won't you find us a pleasant vis-à-vis?"

"Will you accept me, if I can find a partner?"

"Delightful! Bishop, we must have another moment's chat before the close of the evening."

Saying which, Miss Hatherton gathered her ample skirts together, took Saxon's proffered arm, and swept through the room and down the wide old stairs in a very stately fashion.

CHAPTER XXX. THE HOSPITALLER'S GATE.

MR. KECKWITCH sat alone in a little private parlour at the back of the bar of the Hospitalier's Gate Tavern, with a bottle of brown sherry and a couple of glasses before him, waiting patiently. It was the evening of the very

day that his employer spent at Castletowers; but he had not, therefore, left Chancery-lane over five minutes the sooner, or neglected any detail of his regular work. He had, on the contrary, seen his fellow-clerks off the premises, and locked up the office with even more than his usual caution; for Abel Keckwiche was such a highly respectable man, that he would not on any account have taken advantage of Mr. Trefalden's absence. He was waiting, as he had just told the "young lady" who presided at the bar in ringlets and pink ribbons, for a friend. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and although the sky was as yet only grey with dusk, the gas was already lighted; for the Hospitalier's Gate was a queer, old-fashioned, shut-in place, and the daylight always seemed to make a point of getting away from it as early as possible. There was, however, a bright fire burning in the grate; and the bar beyond was all alive with customers. The tops of the great yellow puncheons and the lacquered gas-burners were visible above the blind that veiled the half-glass door of the parlour; and now and then some privileged customer would peep over, stare at the back of Mr. Keckwiche's head, and disappear. But the clerk sat, all unconscious, gazing placidly at the fire, and never once looked round.

But for the brisk trade going on within the precincts of the Gate itself, the place would have been singularly quiet. The passers-by, just at this hour, were few. Sometimes a cab drove up; sometimes a cart rumbled past, but not often. The great stream of traffic flowed close by, along a neighbouring thoroughfare, and was hoarsely audible, like the dull roar of a heavy sea; but the Hospitalier's Gate stood apart, grey, and hoary, and stored with strange old memories, spanning the shabby by-street with its battlemented arch, and echoing, in a ghastly way, to the merriment below.

Standing in the very heart of the City, within a few yards of Smithfield-market, and in the midst of the over-crowded parish of Clerkenwell, this rare old mediæval fragment was scarcely known, even by name, to the majority of Londoners. To the Smithfield drover, the student of Bartholomew's, the compositors of Tallis's press, and the watchmaking population in general, it was a familiar spot. Archaeologists knew of its whereabouts, and held occasional meetings in the oak room over the gateway, where they talked learnedly of Jorden Brisset, the patriarch Heraclius, Thomas Doewrey, Stow, and King Harry the Eighth; and oftentimes moistened their dry discussions with rare old port from cellars that had once held good store of malmsey and sack for the pious knights' own drinking. Literary men remembered it as the cradle of the Gentleman's Magazine, and as the place where Samuel Johnson, in his rags and his pride, ate his dinner behind a screen, like a dog fed from his master's table. But these were pretty nearly all who knew or cared about the Hospitalier's Gate. Hundreds of intelligent Londoners passed within fifty yards of it every

day of their lives, ignorant of its very existence. Of the dwellers to the west of Temple-bar not one in a thousand knew that scarcely a stone's throw from the Charterhouse walls there yet stood some portion of a far more venerable religious foundation, begun in the last year of the eleventh century, and linked with many strange and stirring episodes of English history. Even so true a lover of the antique and picturesque as Leigh Hunt, passed it by in his pleasant memories of the town, without a word.

But Mr. Keckwitch was thinking neither of the good Knights Hospitallers, nor of Dr. Johnson, nor of anything nor any one just then, saving and excepting a certain Mr. Nicodemus Kidd, who had promised to meet him there about eight o'clock that Thursday evening. And Mr. Kidd was late.

The clock in the bar had struck eight long ago. The clock of St. John's Church, close by, had struck a quarter-past, and then half-past, and still Mr. Kidd was not forthcoming. The head clerk looked at his watch, sighed, shook his head, poured out a glass of the brown sherry, and drank it contemplatively. Before he had quite got to the end of it, a jovial voice in the bar, and a noisy hand upon the latch of the glass door, announced his friend's arrival.

Mr. Kidd came in—a tall, florid, good-humoured looking fellow, with a frank laugh, a loud cheery voice, and a magnificent pair of red whiskers. The practised observer, noting his white hat, his showy watch-guard, his free and easy bearing, would have pronounced him at first sight to be a commercial traveller; but the practised observer would for once have been wrong.

"Sorry to have kept you waiting, Mr. Keckwitch," said he, nodding familiarly to his entertainer, drawing a chair to the opposite side of the fire, and helping himself at once to a glass of wine. "Not my fault, I assure you. Sherry, eh? Capital sherry, too. Don't know a better cellar in London, and that's saying something."

"I'm very glad you have been able to look in, Mr. Kidd," said the head clerk, deferentially. "I was particularly anxious to see you."

Mr. Kidd laughed, and helped himself to a second glass.

"It's one of the peculiarities of my profession, Mr. Keckwitch," said he, "that I find the world divided into two classes of people—those who are particularly anxious to see me, and those who are particularly anxious not to see me. Uncommon good sherry, and no mistake!"

Mr. Keckwitch glanced towards the glass-door, edged his chair a little nearer to that of his guest, and said huskily:

"Have you had time, Mr. Kidd, to think over that little matter we were speaking about the other day?"

"That little matter?" repeated Mr. Kidd, in the same loud, off-hand way as before. "Oh yes—I've not forgotten it."

He said this, filling his glass for the third time, and holding it in a knowing fashion between his eye and the lamp. The head clerk

came an inch or two nearer, and, bending forward with his two fat hands upon his knees, ejaculated:

"Well?"

"Well, Mr. Keckwitch?"

"What is your opinion?"

Mr. Kidd tossed off the third glass, leaned back in his chair, and, with a smile of delightful candour, said:

"Well, sir, to be plain with you, I can give no opinion till you and I understand each other a little better."

Mr. Keckwitch breathed hard.

"What do you mean, Mr. Kidd?" said he.

"Haven't I made myself understood?"

Mr. Kidd pushed his glass away, thrust his hands into his pockets, and became suddenly grave and business-like.

"Well, sir," replied he, dropping his noisy voice and jovial smile as if they had been a domino and mask, "this, you see, is an unusual case. It's a sort of case we're not accustomed to. We don't go into things without a motive, and you've given us no motive to go upon."

The clerk's face darkened.

"Isn't it motive enough," said he, "that I want information, and am willing to pay for it?"

"Why, no, Mr. Keckwitch—not quite. We must be satisfied of the use you will make of that information."

"And supposin' I don't want to make use of it at all?"

"Then, sir, I'm afraid we can't help you. We are not spies; we are a legal force. Our business is to promote the ends of justice—not to serve private curiosity."

Mr. Keckwitch looked down, silent, baffled, perplexed.

"I should have thought," said he, "that the mere fact of any professional man keepin' his home and his ways so deadly secret, would be motive enough for inquiry. Where there's mystery, there's safe to be somethin' wrong. People ain't so close when they've nothin' to hide."

"Some folks are eccentric, you know, Mr. Keckwitch."

"It ain't eccentricity," replied the clerk, promptly.

"What then?"

"I can't say. I may have my suspicions; and my suspicions may be right, or may be wrong. Anyhow, one can't see far in the dark."

"No, that's true," replied Mr. Kidd.

"If it was no more than his address, I'd be satisfied," added Keckwitch, staring hard at the fire.

"Now I tell you what it is, sir," said the other, "we must have *your* motive. Why do you want to know a certain person's address? What is it to you where he lives or how he lives?"

"It is a great deal to me," replied Mr. Keckwitch. "I'm a respectable man, and I don't choose to work under any but a respectable employer."

Mr. Kidd nodded, and caressed the red whiskers.

"If, as I suspect, there's somethin' wrong somewhere," the clerk went on to say, "I don't want to be mixed up in it, when the day of reck'nin' comes round."

"Of course not."

"And there's *my* motive."

"Have you always been on good terms, Mr. Keckwitch, with the party in question?"

This was said very sharply and suddenly, but the clerk's face remained stolid and inexpressive as ever.

"Well, Mr. Kidd," said he, "I can't say there's ever been much love lost between us. I've done my duty, and I don't deny that he's done his; but we've been neither friends nor enemies."

Mr. Kidd stared hard at Mr. Keckwitch, and Mr. Keckwitch stared at the fire; the one all scrutiny, the other all unconsciousness. For some minutes both were silent, and the loud mirth at the bar became more distinctly audible. Then Mr. Kidd drew a deep breath, pushed his chair back with the air of one who arrives at a sudden resolution, drew a slip of paper from his waistcoat-pocket, and said:

"Well, sir, if the address is all you require—here it is."

The steely light so rarely seen there flashed into Abel Keckwitch's eyes, and his hand closed on the paper as if it had been a living thing, trying to fly away. He did not even look at it, but imprisoned it at once in a plethoric pocket-book with a massive metal clasp that snapped like a handcuff.

"What's the fee?" said he, eagerly. "What's the fee for this little service, Mr. Kidd?"

"That's a question you must ask at headquarters, sir," replied Mr. Kidd, eyeing the clerk somewhat curiously, and already moving towards the door.

"But you'll take another glass of sherry before you go?"

"Not a drop, sir, thank you—not a drop. Wish you good evening, sir."

And in another moment, Mr. Kidd, with the white hat a trifle on one side, and the jovial smile seeming to irradiate his whole person, had presented himself at the bar, and was saying agreeable things to the young lady with the ringlets.

"Ah, sir," observed she, playfully, "I don't care for compliments."

"Then, my dear, a man must be dumb to please you; for if he has eyes and a tongue, what can he do but tell you you're an angel?"

The barmaid giggled, and bade the gallant stranger "get along!"

"It's a remarkable fact," said Mr. Kidd, "that the prettiest women are always the most hard-hearted. And it's an equally remarkable fact, that the sight of beauty always makes me thirsty. I'll trouble you, Mary, my love, for a bottle of Schewpee."

"That's a good sort of fellow, I'll be bound!" ejaculated a stout woman, looking admiringly after Mr. Kidd as he presently went out with an irresistible air of gentlemanly swagger.

"You think so, do you, ma'am?" said a seedy bystander. "Humph! That's Kidd, the detective."

ELECTION TIME.

ELECTION time is a bad time; a lying time, a corrupting time, a drunken time; a dirty, beer-sloppy, pipe-smoking, cab-driving, bill-posting, tipping, winking, nudging, duffing, dodging, shuffling, guzzling period of disgrace and demoralisation. In a general election time, all England is a riotous taproom, splashed with beer, reeking with tobacco-smoke, and littered with written lies and false promises.

I am not a party man. If the phrase were not so hackneyed and so abused by being so constantly used as a mere bit of clap-trap, I should say that my motto was "Measures, not Men." What, to me, is the difference between Coodle and Doodle? I have not the honour (and I don't want it) to be personally acquainted with either of those resplendent peers. What I know of them, as public men, is, that they are both very good fellows, not in the least desirous to abuse their power or position, and in other respects pretty much like other men. What can it signify to me or to you, or to anybody, which of those honourable and patriotic creatures is at the head of the government, so that he manages our public affairs well? I am, at the present time, so indifferent to the claims of party and individuals, that if a Tory of mark and talent were to put up for the borough for which I have two votes, I would—though strongly inclining to the policy of the so-called liberals—give him a plumper; being convinced that the two liberal members who happen to represent us, are muffs, and, on their own merits, utterly unworthy of our suffrages.

I mention this, to show that I have no personal or party sympathy with either side—except on certain special grounds, which I will state presently. No; as regards election tactics they are both tarred with the same brush. *Experientia docet*. How my views have changed on this subject! When I was a boy at school, far away among the mountains of Scotland, I thought a general election the most delightful thing in the world. The earl's son, who always stood for the county, and always got in—for the very good reason that his father was the landlord of more than three-fourths of the electors—came to our school in his carriage, addressed some of the electors there, and procured for us, the boys, a half holiday. His colours were blue and yellow, and I remember going home and hunting over my mother's drawers for some scraps of ribbon to make me a favour of. What an excitement there was when the earl's son drove up the country road in an open carriage with four grey horses, and his postilions in flaming red jackets. I shall never forget those postilions. I had never seen postilions before, and they impressed me strangely. I can see them now joggling in

their saddles, looking so fossil-like and antediluvian. I can remember them more distinctly than I can remember the earl's son, who was a weak washed out young man, who looked foolish, and stammered in his speech; but who for all that was the representative of our intelligent community in parliament. I think that if I had been presented with the earl's son's "turn out," I should have followed the example of the Emperor of China, who, when George the Third made him a present of a state coach, bundled the coachman inside, and sat on the box himself. I should have much preferred to be the postilion in the red jacket, to being the son of the noble earl. On that half holiday, we boys did not indulge our imitative propensities in making a stammering speech like the earl's son; but in riding on chairs like the postilions. I confess, even now, that in after life I met with postilions who interested me more than many members of parliament. And yet I know the names of the uninteresting members of parliament, and don't know the names of the interesting postilions!

I was casting my jackets when my second election occurred. The earl's son was again in the field; but the earl in the mean time, having got into difficulties and mortgaged part of his property, there was opposition. It was necessary for the earl's son to bestir himself. For some time previous to the election he went about among the tenantry, flattering them, making them little presents, and kissing their pretty daughters. Being a clansman of the earl's, and a nine hundred and ninety-ninth cousin, I was enlisted in the service. I was rigged out from top to toe in a suit of tartan—the tartan of our clan—and thus arrayed, and mounted upon an ancient grey mare, I accompanied the earl's son as an outrider. I had rather a pleasant time of it. I came in for a great deal of haggis and mince collops and whisky, and where there was more kissing than my chief could do I helped him out with it. In that tartan suit—it was bright red—and on that spanking grey mare, I felt that I shot through the land like a fiery meteor. I was very impartial, and kissed the old women as well as the young women, and without vanity, I do think they would have elected me in preference to the earl's son, if I had not been so very far removed from the heirship to the property. We didn't bribe, we didn't hint at ejection, or abatement, or increase of rent—the earl was too honourable a man for that—we merely flattered and condescended, and we kissed and we prattled with all the fair maids, and called each the fairest she, as the song says. We won the election. It was a very innocent affair, and I wish I had never seen any worse mode of canvassing for votes.

But we may all learn, if we will, from what we see in a general election time, that except in very special cases, it is money not merit that makes the member of parliament. It is vain and useless to try to do without corruption in some form or other. Andrew Marvell may put up for parliament with the virtuous resolve not to spend a penny; but if

he get elected you may be sure that his friends have spent money for him. He bribes vicariously; he cannot help it. The law holds that the hiring of committee-rooms and cabs is not bribery; but morally it *is* bribery, and bribery of a mean, besotted, and degrading kind. I will state exactly what has occurred in a certain borough. I will suppose, for example, that our two members are liberals, and that they represent the general politics of the constituency. We are quite satisfied with their conduct in parliament, and we have no desire to make a change. When, however, we heard that there was not likely to be any legitimate opposition to them, we said to ourselves, "This will never do; we highly approve of our representatives, and have the greatest confidence in them; but we cannot allow them to walk over the course. This has been a very dull season; we must do something to cause a little money to be spent, while there is a chance left." What did we do? Why, we got a Conservative (hired him from a club in Pall-Mall) to start in opposition to the two liberals. What was the consequence? The borough woke up, and money began to fly. Committee-rooms were engaged, bills were printed, agents were hired, and cabs chartered by the score. You should have seen the swarm of half-starved human rats that came out of their holes the minute the opposition was announced. They were all of the same pattern—lean, and hollow-eyed, and red-nosed, rusty, ragged, and mouldy, with a flavour of stale spirits about them. They looked as if they had never seen the light since the last election, and had now just woke up from a seven years' sleep and crept out of their holes to get a few more half sovereigns and another dose of drink. They were immediately engaged, at salaries ranging from ten shillings to half-a-crown a day; some as committee-men, some as canvassers, others to run errands and distribute bills.

Our opposition was not a bogus candidate. He was the real thing; had plenty of money, and, if he had been elected, would have been no discredit to the borough. But if a respectable candidate had not come forward, we could easily have found somebody to answer the purpose. An Old Election Hand, whom we consulted, told us that he could find a person—a public character, too—who would stand for a ten-pound note; but that the difficulty with such parties was to get them to retire when they were no longer wanted. The Old Hand had once given a radical lecturer ten pounds to stand, and he had to give him twenty to sit down again. During this election time almost every third public-house in our borough displayed bills, informing the free and independent electors that So-and-so's committee "sits here daily." Do you know what those committee-rooms mean, what they do in them? Well; first of all, they mean from three to ten pounds a week in the pocket of the landlord of the house; and next, they mean a very large extra consumption of drink at the bar. What they do in those committee-rooms? The most presentable rat that can be found, is stationed there in an arm-chair with a copy of

the register beside him; and his business is to send out emissaries to influence the electors, to take notes of promises, to calculate chances, and to vary these occupations with frequent adjournments to the bar to drink. I visited several of those committee-rooms in our borough, and in one of them I was told that Mr. Short had no chance, because he was only giving three pounds for his committee-rooms, while Mr. Long was giving six. "Lor' bless you, sir! Mr. Long's agent knows how to do things! He went to the White Lion to engage a committee-room, and the landlord told him he hadn't got one. But the agent soon persuaded him that he had!"

As to cabs. There are many electors who don't care about voting, who have no opinion one way or other, and who won't come to the poll, unless you send for them. These electors would sell themselves any day for a crown. If you can afford to send a cab for them, they will come up and vote for you. If you can't, they won't trouble themselves to exercise their right, or their trust, or their proud privilege, or whatever you please to call it. And for the rest, it will be significant to mention that all cab-owners have votes, and that a good many cab-drivers have votes; while printers, stationers, and bill-stickers, have both votes and influence.

A general election is the funeral of all principle, and the rats who come from their holes at that time represent the undertakers' men. As you see some loved one carried away from you on the shoulders of a set of drunken ribald ruffians, so you see the regis of our "glorious constitution" raised on high by loafers and sots, by the vilest scum boiled up from the bottom of the pot of society. And all this is made worse by the unblushing speeches of the Candidates (who know all about it) concerning integrity and purity of election.

The stench of the Thames in the old days before main drainage, the advertising vans, the garotters, the mad dogs, none of these have been such a nuisance as the recent electioneering. For weeks, the summer air has been tainted with the false fumes and vapours of a political orgie. After my experience of it in our borough, the thought comes across me that the state of things could not well be worse, if the right of voting were in the hands of the upper ten thousand of the working classes. Nay, the thought comes across me that the state of things might be better; that the new voters might have a higher sense of their responsibility, might know better how to appreciate worth and merit in those who seek their suffrages, and might set an example of integrity and patriotism which might leaven our electoral system for great good.

Does our electoral system want leavening for good? Consider its present working with a reference to one "Interest" alone. There is a certain interest called the Railway Interest, seeking representation at the hands of contractors, agents, and scrip-jobbers—very unfortunately and very expensively for railway shareholders. By a thousand indirect means (not least among them by "putting on" at election time, in little out-of-the-way places, gangs of men who are

not wanted there for any other purpose than to spend wages, and make uproarious crowds) such candidates, favoured by unworthy voters, get into parliament. The minister, who must have his majority, is afraid to touch the "Interest" that can give him so many votes. The "Interest" is left untouched, in the face of the most appalling preventable accidents, and the most horrible destruction and mutilation of life, over and over again repeated. The Vice-President of the Board of Trade, with the "Interest" behind him, is as cool about these calamities as if his fellow-creatures were flies, and rather boasts than otherwise that he does not know which is the "up-line" of a railway, and which the "down." If the electors sent the elected to parliament in the public interest, and not in this "Interest," or in that, is it not probable that they would very emphatically teach such public servants which is the "In" side of a House of Commons (not to say of a government), and which the "Out"?

On this head of the Vice-President of the Board of Trade, and the "Interest" he is so afraid of, and so daintily uninformed and humorous upon, there is a passage in an obscure work of fiction called *HARD TIMES*, which would be almost prophetic but for its absurd shortcoming in respect of the damage done by a railway accident. It may fitly conclude this paper, as a hint to free and independent electors.

"Among the fine gentlemen not regularly belonging to the Gradgrind school, there was one of a good family and a better appearance, with a happy turn of humour which had told immensely with the House of Commons on the occasion of his entertaining it with his (and the Board of Directors') view of a railway accident, in which the most careful officers ever known, employed by the most liberal managers ever heard of, assisted by the finest mechanical contrivances ever devised, the whole in action on the best line ever constructed, had killed five people and wounded thirty-two, by a casualty without which the excellence of the whole system would have been positively incomplete. Among the slain was a cow, and among the scattered articles unowned, a widow's cap. And the honourable member had so tickled the House (which has a delicate sense of humour) by putting the cap on the cow, that it became impatient of any serious reference to the Coroner's Inquest, and brought the railway off with Cheers and Laughter."

GERMAN OPERA AND ITS MAKERS.

IN THREE CHAPTERS. CHAPTER III.

It would have been easy to encumber the outlines conveyed in the two foregoing chapters on Opera, by mentioning the names of many industrious persons and carefully-trained musicians who fed the theatres of Germany in the interval which elapsed betwixt the times of Keyser and Bach, and that breaking out of Beethoven's amazing genius, which brought to a head, so to say, the revolution in German opera; and fixed the form under which it has since presented itself. But such enumeration would pro-

duce only a depressing list of productions of forgotten industry;—some thousand (to be moderate) of respectable works having been composed, produced, succeeded, and died, without making any sign. The fecundity of the second-rate Italian opera composers of the eighteenth century has not been greater—but though slighter, the traces which they have left are more numerous. There is hardly a man, even of mediocre mark among them, some song by whom does not, from time to time, turn up again—in nine cases out of ten, fuller of melody, and not poorer in thought—than the last extravagance of Signor Verdi and those belonging to his school.

Setting, then, the meritorious opera-manufacturers of Germany on one side, as without significance, there remain but two composers (and the shadow of the second of these) to speak of as filling the interval betwixt Beethoven and Herr Wagner. It is true that a contemporary of Beethoven, Schubert, showed in his "Lieder" that feeling for melody, and for the adaptation of sound to situation, as well as to sense, which ought to have given many real masterpieces to the German opera stage. But Schubert, though endowed beyond most musicians with ideas, was not gifted with the spirit of discretion. In every work of any length from his pen, there will be found a tediousness arising from want of proportion, and a feebleness of constructive power, which are fatal when the thing to be produced is drama in music. Owing to want of tact, the operas of Cherubini have languished: and many of the operas of Schubert could never be brought to the light of the footlights. The fragments which we know, and the entire work, "Der Hausliche Krieg," produced not long ago at Vienna, are curious from the want of that style which so eminently distinguished Schubert's shorter vocal compositions and his piano-forte music,—a want possibly ascribable to one of his occupations, the writing of pieces to be introduced into other men's operas. He is said to have done this in works by Herold and Auber so successfully, that it was impossible for those not in the secret to separate the interpolated from the original matter. His overture to his own "Rosmunda" is as French as if it had been born in the Rue Lepelletier.

It was about eight years after "Fidelio" was produced, and before Beethoven's opera, or indeed the mass of his other music was received with any universal relish in Germany, that another thoroughly individual composer began to make characteristic and copious contributions to the stores of stage music in that country. This was Louis Spohr, one of the most peculiar figures in the Pantheon—more peculiar than engaging. Few artists, however, have led such honourable and industrious lives as he,—or so little blameworthy. He was born to good and God-fearing parents; and seems to have felt the wholesome influence of their early training, in the ordinance of his career, from first to last. But the amiability which has belonged to so many worse and disordered men was apparently denied

him. His outer bearing was a type of the manner in which his life was regulated. Gifted by Nature with a noble and imposing presence (possibly he was one of the tallest violin-players that ever presented himself in an orchestra), and with a manner which might take some of its tincture from sincere uprightness, but which was certainly not graced by that considerateness for others which endears its possessor—Spohr strode on through life with a straightforward self-assertion, but without any apparent care for much beyond his own concerns, or much will or power to appreciate the great men of the golden age of modern music, into the midst of which genial fate had thrown him. His autobiography, published the other day, is a revelation as speaking as it is singular;—from the honest and unveiled self-complacency with which its writer devotes himself to his own doings, and the poor (rather than grudging) measure of observation he could bring to the productions of his contemporaries, and to their characters. He is energetic in describing the odd outrageous gestures of Beethoven when conducting an orchestra; but shows himself little capable of owning that that storm-tossed and ill-starred poet was withal a being of a height and a grandeur—of a force in flight like an eagle's—of a brilliancy of invention as though lightning could be fixed as sunlight—transcending those of any predecessor or contemporary. He is critical, again, almost cynical, in citing some of the carelessnesses and common-places in Rossini's music (just as if he was not to live to express and exhibit the common-places into which a heavier and *thicker* creative power can fall), but cold to the exquisite spontaneity of Southern beauty, which breathes in the works of that captivating master:—not so much antagonistic, perhaps, as incapable of receiving. The harp-playing of Dorette, his wife, a tearful sensitive woman, whom we cannot help suspecting her lord and master (howbeit unconsciously) worked very hard, his own successes as a consummate performer on the violin, his respectable resolution to support the dignity of Music, in the face of the etiquette by which it was treated as an offering of vassalage, rather than as an art to be cherished, in too many German courts,—figure in every page of this record; but there is not a single one containing such bright thoughts, such charming pictures, as light up the letters of one who, it may be, as mannered in music as Spohr, was as universal in his sympathies as Spohr was *not*—the engaging and great-hearted Mendelssohn.

These traits and characteristics have not been assembled with any miserable desire to cast dirt on an honest man's grave, but rather to show cause why the productions of an artist who was so self-engrossed as well as so enterprising, should not contain that universal appeal to sympathy and admiration which makes real works of art endure, whereas the manner of mechanism must pass away. It is observable, however, that Spohr, while trammelled by egotism to a degree never perhaps equalled in art save by that greater genius, Wordsworth, was in advance of

his time. He held that German legend, for German opera, was that which every German man, averse to Italian sorceries, ought to prepare himself to undertake. With a singularly sober and restricted fancy, his elected subjects were fantastic or romantic. He had a hankering after the popular tale of "Der Freischütz" long ere Weber thought of setting the same—after the picturesque legend of "Tannhäuser" (versioned, in a thousand forms, as the temptation of Spirit by Sensual allurements), something like half a century ere Wagner was thought of. His first stage attempt was the "Owl Queen," "Alruna," to be followed by "Faust," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Widow of Malabar," "Pietro von Abano," "The Alchemist," "A Crusader's Story," every one of these subjects demanding vivacity of local colour. Yet, save in the supernatural music of Spohr's "Faust" (not Goethe's "Faust," recollect, but based on a tawdry melodrama), and the opening of the Indian opera "Jessonda," nothing of the kind was effected by him. It must be further said that solid as is the mass of vocal music written by Spohr, not one popular melody from his pen could be named. It cannot, however, be assumed that with Spohr this avoidance of popularity was on system. He was naturally arid, trite, and short of breath as a tune-maker; commanding a certain solemnity and richness of harmony peculiar to himself, and a monotony in his manner of procedure which for a time will pass for originality of constructive power with the student, till he discovers that there is one form of progression, one series of chords elect, one close, as wearisomely to be met with Spohr's operas, as the veriest Italian platitudes which the Germans took the field against. It is obvious, too, that Spohr had no objection to such vocal parade as he could make. Cunigunda's great song, "Si lo sento," in "Faust," the well-known duet in "Jessonda," many pieces of music in "Zemira and Azor," are florid, though of no common difficulty, as having been written by one who had never studied the uses of the human voice in the only real school—that of Italy. A clever singer, as whimsically quaint in her phraseology as she was clever, once characterised the florid songs in Handel's oratorios as demanding "devout agility" on the part of the singer. Spohr's bravura music calls for a power of "heavy caroling" which makes it ungracious, only partially effective, and possibly more difficult to execute with finish, than any music of the kind which can be set before the show singer.

All this said and sung—two of Spohr's operas, "Faust" and "Jessonda," keep the stage in Germany; though at the time present they do so under conditions of traditional endurance rather than warm welcome. There is in them a certain imposition of stateliness, an individuality (and be it for better for worse, that quality has a value of its own), a respectability (so to say) bespeaking a man of worth, on most complacent terms with himself,—which cannot hinder their being felt dull, it is true, but which command a

fair and favourable construction; and should do so, till the world of artists and connoisseurs shall become utterly lawless in its desire for new sensations, and utterly stupid in confounding impudent barren folly with thought and idea too profound to be relished by those not initiated. Heavy as Spohr's operas are, extracts from them can be heard from time to time,—and they are upborne, so to say, by the wide and well-earned and permanent reputation won by their maker as a special master of his instrument, the Violin. Viewed in this light, Spohr may be characterised as having been for Germany what Bach was for the Organ. And it would amount to ingratitude, no less than injustice, if it were not added, that he was beloved by the many pupils whom he gathered round him, none of whom—and some score could be named—passed from under his hands without having had instilled into them true, earnest principles, and that well-based knowledge of technical effect on which, for basis, any fabric, however wondrous, fantastic, or daring, can be built. As a violin master, Spohr was not to be surpassed; as a composer, especially of vocal and dramatic music, we cannot call to mind a single follower who has imitated his manner.

A greater contrast could not be named in the persons of two men, both famous in German art, both of whom influenced it more or less largely, than betwixt Spohr and Weber. In their education, in their lives, in their works, in their successes, no two men could stand further apart—the one as an orderly man and musician, the other, in comparison, a waif and stray, whose gipsy genius somehow seduced and enthralled his German world (and the world, also, beyond the confines of Germany) as no composer of German opera has been enabled to do, before or since Weber's time.

What a pity it is that the lives of musicians are so ill written, being generally as they are richer in incident than those of the painters! The complaint laid by the stupid against the class, as merely consisting of colourless, characterless, frivolous folk; when taken away from the absorbing egotism of their display, useless as members of society, and performing the duties of life indifferently—has been largely alimented by the dulness, in place of just and appreciating record, of the library of musical biographies. Herr Crysander's Life of Handel, "a dungeon" of little facts and dates (to use the Scotch phrase), is not to be endured, because of its utter heaviness. Dr. Schmid's Memoir of Gluck (a capital subject) is no less leaden, though mercifully more compendious. The four awful volumes by Dr. Jahn devoted to Mozart, call for a patience little short of his who has to drive a tunnel through a granite rock. Beethoven is without a decent biography as yet; the want possibly to be supplied by the enthusiastic American collector, Mr. Thayer, who is known to have ransacked every corner of Europe, where material might exist during some twenty years. We have been recalled to this disappointment and poverty by turning to the high-flown life of Weber the other

day, published by his son, and paraphrased for this country (we doubt not with chastisement of much rapture and rhapsody) by Mr. Palgrave Simpson.

There is stuff in the tale, had it been simply told, to make a book as good as a romance, and more instructive (no offence to "the cloth") than ninety-nine out of a hundred sermons. It is full of character. The father of the genius was one of those blustering, vain, scheming men, who think nothing of the treasure committed to their charge, save as a means of contributing to their own (not his) aggrandisement and fortune. Whereas Leopold, the parent of the great Mozart, shows himself to have been sagacious, moral, and clear-sighted in his attempts to order the career of his son the genius,—the old Von Weber was bombastic, grasping, utterly unfit for the stewardship of any one's destinies—a dishonest, showy, vulgar adventurer; a man who set up miserable assertions of ancestral pride, yet could drag about his hapless family, when following the course of a strolling player's life, till the weaker ones dropped by the way and died of fatigue. He had no scruple to deter him from underhand transactions, as in the case of Aloys Sennefelder, the discoverer of lithography, whose secrets he may be said to have pirated, after having associated himself with the discoverer; when his son was installed in a foul service belonging to the court of Würtemberg, compared with which attendance among the rabble of Comus looks like a white-handed transaction, tracked out his luckless child, and was accessory, if not principal, in the act of embezzlement, the shame and sorrow of which cling to Weber's name, let recognition for his fascinating genius be ever so eager, ever so grateful.

And fascinating Weber's genius was—to a point unattained by any previous opera composer, so purely German as himself. "*Flatter- ing*," Mendelssohn called it, with his racy appropriation of English. Even Spohr, the self-engrossed, was compelled to admit that Weber knew how to get at "the masses"—which the grave and elaborate man himself never could do in opera. There was born to Weber that in-born spirit of melody, lacking which music is "nought." Of all the modern writers of German opera who have plodded and "potted an immensity" (to quote Mrs. Fanny Kemble's quaint phrase), among the Lindpaintners and the Lachners, and the contrivers and the combiners, Weber stands out as *the one man*. He was never well taught—how could he be, with a wretched father like his, urging him on from place to place, from master to master, from anybody to anybody, out of whom anything showy was to be got? His best chance of learning was under the Abbé Vogler;—but that clever dreamer, with all his instruments and inventions, and the scrap of genius involved in both, was (*pace* Mr. Browning) a quack: dangerous as an influence in proportion to his apparent pretensions of science—a man better able to stimulate than to settle the spirits of younger persons.

But in spite of his horrible father—in spite of his empirical master—in spite of a youth forth from which the young man did not emerge without soil, damage, all that is worst to youth, all that is least easily to be laughed or to be washed off—in spite of the seeds of premature death having been sown in a frail body—abused by prodigious exertion and precocious dissipation, let the student of German opera, as distinct from opera in the Italian style—or according to French conventions—let him look at what Weber did, what his doings foreshadowed—and the place of the man will assert itself as above any writer of German opera—Beethoven not excepted—if only for this reason—that the writer of Opera must not be satisfied to devote himself to great and noble ideas of art, but *must* get his public.

This Weber did with a power, an originality, a genius, such as make him the last of the great Germans. There is not a bar of his music which is Italian (save, perhaps, his grand scenas, "*Portia*," "*Atalia*," and a few others), still less is there a bar which owes anything to French inspiration. Intensely German as he was, he had, nevertheless, beyond any of his countrymen of whom I am cognisant, a feeling for national colour. It was not merely, with him, a case of making the gloomy scene of conjuration in "*Der Freischütz*," which has unsettled the brains of many a dozen would-be composers, and driven them to extremes of ugliness, utterly intolerable to every sane person. When he had to write a preface—for such is an overture—to Carlo Gozzi's "*Turandot*," he got up a Chinese humour. When he had to deal with "*Oberon*," he could Orientalise himself. The opening of "*Euryanthe*," with its glorious chorus of ladies and knights, is animated with the very breath of French chivalry, though the handling of the groups is German. Most of all, must be cited the exquisite prelude to "*Preciosa*," with its Spanish and gipsy humour. I dwell on these things, because they are so familiar as to have been overlooked as so many matters of course—and because Weber has not had fair justice done him. Only the other day a lecturer on modern music, no less intelligent and ingenious than Mr. John Hullah, could discuss modern opera, and absolutely leave this greatest among the pure Germans (the distinction being borne in mind) without a single passing word.

There is no need to dwell on the incompleteness of Weber; to point out how, rich as he was in the spirit of melody, he had never subjected himself to a due study of materials, their tints, and their beauties. He did not care whether the singer was torn to pieces or not, provided a certain effect was created; and thus, it may be said, that though those who have supported the parts of his heroines can be counted by hundreds, only one could be named who filled out the outline offered by him to perfection. This was Madame Schroeder Devrient; who was as truly the type of a German opera singer, as he was the type of a German opera composer. Both were

overstrained, possibly under some false unexpressed notions of nationality and truth—certainly owing to education on mistaken principles. Madame Schroeder was a crude and exaggerated singer of the music of Gluck—but, as Agatha and Euryanthe, she has left her own royal mark on the recollection of every one who has heard and seen her.

Were one to speculate on the influences of disorder in youth, as shown in Weber's indifference to proportion, climax, animation in his opera-books, it would be easy to become super-subtle. After all, what opera composer is there who could be named (save Gluck, or, with a long interval, Bellini) that seems to have exercised much prescient and poetical judgment of the tale he was to treat? It has been, here, a bit of costume, there, a solitary situation, which have seduced the strong, the weak, the careful, the careless, to waste their time, and energy, and melody, and counterpoint. And the wonder is, not that so few operas survive, but that so many have come to light, and have enjoyed a life of popularity.

Think of these things what we may, Weber created a school of opera-writers in Germany. Only one of these, however, is worth naming in a chapter which does not profess to do the duty of an article in an Encyclopædia; this is Marschner, in whose operas every defect of Weber's style is brought out—the unlovely, preposterous strain on the voices, the *making shift* of getting over an awkward passage by crude harmonic progressions,—and yet who had in himself a grain of individual fancy and invention. His “Templar and Jewess,” a version of “Ivanhoe,” shows as much. Had he been less harsh, jealous, less occupied by those miserable petty cares and rivalries which make German court appointments not like so many beds of roses, as to “Damien's bed of steel,” Marschner might have extricated himself into originality; for in all music—in opera music especially—originality can be gained by labour, thought, and constant experience.

With Marschner's name this small chronicle comes to a stop, since in sketching the story of German opera there is no need to dwell on the slighter productions—not light in substance though in seeming—of the doleful jokers who have tried to make German comic opera. Nicolai's “Merry Wives of Windsor” is the best and most enduring specimen, but there is not a dream of Germany in it. It is half French, half Italian.

Nor is there need to discuss the glories and influences of Meyerbeer, because all these return (da capo) to the grand opera of France, and because Meyerbeer cannot by any magic be accepted as a German composer of opera, and is now repudiated by them.

The nightmares imposed on a helpless and astray public by Herr Wagner, may be “left alone in their glory”—for the moment at least. What manner of influence they have had, was to be heard last autumn in the horrible music

of the Carlsruhe Festival, described in these columns. We imagine it to be already decaying.

THE FIT OF AILSIE'S SHOE.

CHAPTER I.

ON a certain mellow August afternoon an old woman was travelling along the sea-girt road between Portrush and Dunluce. She wore a long grey cloak, and a scarlet neckerchief thrown over her white cap. Her face was unusually sallow and wrinkled, with small, shrewd, furtive eyes. She carried a stick, and halted now and then from fatigue.

She looked often from right to left, and from left to right, over the sea, heaving helplessly under its load of blazing brooding glory, and inland, over the stretches of green and golden, where cattle drowsed and corn ripened. She seemed like one not assured of her way, and looking for landmarks. Presently she stopped by some boys who were playing marbles under a hedge to ask whereabouts might stand the house of one James MacQuillan.

“Is it Jamie's you want?” said the eldest lad; “there it's, up the hill yonder, with its shoulder agin the haystack. But if you're goin' there, I'll tell you that Ailsie's out at the fair. Mother saw her pass our door at sunrise this mornin'.”

From the way he gave his information, the urchin evidently thought that, Ailsie being from home, it was worth no one's while to climb the hill to Jamie's. Noway staggered in her purpose by the news, however, the old woman proceeded on her travels, and took her way to the haystack.

She plodded up a green-hedged lanan, and emerged from it on a causeway of round stones bedded in clay. Here stood “Jamie's,” a white cottage smothered in fuchsia-trees. There was a sweet scent of musk and sitherwood hanging about, and a wild rose was nailed against the gable. A purple pigeon was cooing on the russet thatch, and a lazy cloud of smoke was reluctantly mingling its blue vapour with the yellow evening air. Overtopping the chimney there rose a golden cock of new-made hay. The old woman snuffed the fragrant breath of the place, poked at the fuchsia-bushes with her stick, and peered all about her with her shrewd bright eyes. At last she approached the open door and looked across the threshold.

There was a small room with a clay floor, a fire winking on the hearth almost blinded out by the sun, a spinning-wheel in the corner, an elderly woman knitting beside the window, and a check-curtained bed standing in the corner, in which a sickly man sat up with a newspaper spread on his knees.

“God save all here!” said the visitor, pushing in her head at the door. “An' is this Jamie MacQuillan's?”

“As sure as my name's Jamie,” said the weakly man, taking off his spectacles. “Take a seat, ma'am. You'd be a thraveller maybe, comin' home from the fair?”

The old woman had dropped into a chair, panting with fatigue.

"It's no shame for ye," she gasped, "that ye don't know me, seein' that ye never set eyes on me before; but I'm wan o' the McCambridges, from beyont Lough Neagh, an' I've walked every foot o' the road to see you an' yours."

"Why, you don't mane to say that?" cried Jamie, his pale face lighting up. "You don't mane to say you're Shaun McCambridge's sister Penny, own cousin to my father's second wife, that was to have stood for our Ailsie at her christenin', only she took a pain in her heel and couldn't stir from home? Faith, an' I might have knowed you by the fine hook o' your nose, always an' ever the sign o' the rale oold blood. Throth that same blood's thicker nor wather. Mary machree, it's Penny McCambridge, from Lough Neagh side!"

Mary, the wife, now lifted her voice in welcome.

"Good luck to you, cousin Penny," she said. "The sight o' wan o' your folks is the cure for sore eyes. Come over an' give us the shake o' your han', for not a stir can I stir this year past with the pains, no more nor Jamie there that's down on his back since May. Och, it's the poor do-less pair we'd be only for our Ailsie, that's han's an' feet to us both, an' keeps things together out an' in."

A great hand-shaking followed this speech, and then the visitor began to inquire for Ailsie, her god-daughter that was to have been, only for the unfortunate pain in the heel.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit," said the father; "she'll be in from the fair by-an'-by, an' then if ye don't give her the degree for han'somest girl and the best manager that ever stepped about a house, I'll give ye lave to go back to Lough Neagh an' spend the rest o' your days sarchin' for her aquals."

"Whisht, Jamie," said the mother; "self praise is no praise, no more is praise o' yer own flesh an' blood. All the same, I wisht Ailsie was in to make cousin Penny the cup o' tay after her thravels. She was to bring a grain o' the best green from Misther McShane's, in Portrush, as well as all the news from Castle Craigie, an' of the doin's of oold Lady Betty MacQuillan, more power to her!"

"Is that the oold lady that's come home from Ingia?" asked she who was called Penny McCambridge.

"Ay, ay," said the wife of Jamie, eagerly. "Ye've passed through Portrush, an' ye'll maybe have the foreway of Ailsie with the news. What are they saying in the town?"

"Well, ye see," said Penny, "bein' a stranger, and spakin' to few, I heard but little. But they do say that her husband was the last of the MacQuillans of Castle Craigie, an' that as she has ne'er a child of her own, all the MacQuillans in the country are claimin' kin with her, an' fightin' among them about which 'll be her heir."

"An' is that all ye know, Penny dear?" said Mary. "Why, I have more nor that mysel'.

Sure she's written round an' round to every MacQuillan o' them all, biddin' them to a grand house-warmin' on Wensday come eight days, when she'll settle it all, an' name who's to come after her. An' though she's in London now, she'll be at Castle Craigie afore then to resave them. An' sich a resavin' as that'll be! Sich fixin' an' furbishin' as there is at the oold castle. They say there never was the likes o' it seen since the day Sir Archie MacQuillan brought home his fairy bride, an' then it wasn't painters an' bricklayers, but the 'good people' themselves that laid han's on the rooms."

"She must be a queer sort of a body," said Penny. "But I hope, Jamie, that you, as honest a man, an' as good a MacQuillan as ever a wan among them, I hope you haven't been shy of sendin' in your claim."

"Och, Penny, if you'd only put that much spunk into him!" cried Mary, with energy, "it's what I'm sayin' to him mornin' noon an' night, an' it's no more to him than the crickets chirpin'."

"Stop your grumblin', Mary," said the husband, "there's richer nor us, and there's poorer, but we're not so mane yet as to go cravin' for what we're not likely to get. It's not to MacQuillans like us that Lady Betty has sent her invite."

"An' more shame for her!" cried Mary, waxing wroth. "Listen to me, cousin Penny. When Lady Betty's husband, Sir Dillon MacQuillan that's dead an' gone, was nothing but plain Dillon, an' the youngest of seven sons, he went off an' married wan or'nary-faced, low-born lass, called Betty O'Flanigan, an' brought her all the way from county Wexford to Castle Craigie here, thinkin' he had nothin' to do in the world but ring the gate bell, an' walk in with his wife. It was Christmas-time, an' hard weather, an' sich feastin' an' visitin' goin' on at the castle, when all at wanst the news o' the marriage come down like a clap on the family. It took six men to hold oold Sir Patrick, he was in that mad a rage, an' you may guess it was little welcome poor Betty got when Dillon brought her to the door. The two o' them had just to turn back the way they come, an' it beginnin' to snow, when Jamie there, that was then a lad of fifteen, he was standin' out by his mother's door, an' he spied them comin' down the road. Betty had on a fine gown, but she looked very lonesome, poor body, an' Jamie knowin' what had happened, he up an' he says:

"Mrs. MacQuillan," says he, 'it's comin' on a storm, an' it'll be hard on you goin' further the night,' says he. 'And if you'll be so good as to step inside,' says he, 'it's my mother 'll be glad to see you.'

"Poor Betty was glad to hear the word, an' in she went, an' stay there she did for two weeks, till her husband got their passage taken out to Ingia. An' when she was goin' away, an' biddin' good-by, she says to Jamie, she says, 'Jamie, my boy, if ever Betty MacQuillan comes home from Ingia a rich woman, she'll find out you an' yours if you're above the arth, an' mind you, she'll pay you back your good turn!'

"Many's the time I hard the story from Jamie's mother, rest her sowl!" Mary went on. "An' it's the fine fortune Dillon an' Betty made in Ingia. Two years back, when the last of the brothers died without childer, we hard that Sir Dillon was comin' back to end his days in Castle Craigie. But that news wasn't stale till we hard o' his death, poor man! An' now Betty's comin' back her lone, a rich woman, an' a fine lady. An' I'll just ax you, cousin Penny, if it wouldn't fit her better to be lookin' afther Jamie there that offered her the shelter o' the roof when she was in need o't, than to be huntin' up a pack o' highflyers, the very set that sneered an' sniggered over her disgrace in the dhrawn-room at the castle the day she was turned from the gates?"

Cousin Penny had given attentive ear to the wife, and now she turned to the husband.

"What do you say to that now, Jamie?" she asked, with a knowing twinkle of her shrewd bright eyes.

"I say this," cried Jamie, crackling and folding at his paper with energy. "I say that the man or boy, it's all wan, that does a good turn expectin' to be paid for it, deserves no more thanks than a man that sells a cow and dhrires a good bargain. An' I say that Mary ought to be ashamed to sit there talking of sich a thing that happened forty year ago, an' if Ailsie was here she wouldn't—but good luck to her! there she is hersel', gone past the window."

All the three pair of eyes were now turned to the doorway, whose sunny space was obscured for a moment by as pretty a figure as any lover of fresh and pleasant sights could wish to see. This was a ripe-faced, dark-haired, country girl, with her coarse straw bonnet tipped over her forehead to save her eyes from the sun, and her neat print gown tucked tidily up over her white petticoat.

"Come in, Ailsie!" cried Jamie, "come in an' see your cousin, Penny McCambridge, from Lough Neagh side, that was to have been your godmother, an' has come every fut o' the road from that to this, to see what sort o' lass you've turned out."

"Make haste an' make us the cup o' tay," said her mother. "I hope you didn't forget to bring us a grain o' the best green from Misther McShane's? Good girl! An' how did yer eggs an' butter sell? I'll lay you a shillin' you haven't the sign o' either wan or the other to set before the stranger this day!"

"Maybe I haven't though!" said Ailsie, laughing. "It's by the fine good luck I put by two nice little pats under a dish, afore I went off this mornin'. An' as for eggs, if Mehaffy hasn't laid wan afore this time o' day, I'll put her in the pot for a lazy big hen, an' cousin Penny 'll stay an' help to ate her."

A nice little meal was set, and Ailsie flung herself on a bench to rest.

"An' now you'll have breath to tell us the news, Ailsie," said Mary the mother, sipping her tea complacently. "What's doin' an' sayin' in Portrush about Lady Betty?"

"Oh throth, mother!" said Ailsie, tossing her head, "throth I'm sick, sore, an' tired, hearin' o' the quare old house she's pulled down on her back, poor body! Sich gregin' an' comparin' you never hard since the day you were born. The frien's o' wan MacQuillan, an' the frien's o' another, at it hard an' fast for which 'll have the best chance of comin' in for the coud lady's favour. An' sich preparations! Mrs. Quinn, the housekeeper, took me all through the castle to see the new grandeur; an' sich curtains, an' pictures, an' marble images, an' sich lookin'-glasses! feth, when I went to the dhrawn-room door, I thought I'd gone crazy, for half a dozen other Ailsies started up in the corners an' all over the walls, an' come to meet me with their baskets on their arms. An' then there's the ball-room where the dancin's to be, all hung round with green things, an' the floor as slippery an' as shiny as the duck pond was last Christmas in the long frost. An' I went into Miss O'Trimmins, the dressmaker, to see if her tooth-ache was better, an' I do declare she could hardly reach me her little finger across the heaps of silks an' muzzins that she had piled about her there in her room. An' while I was there, a carriage dashed up to the door, an' out stepped the five Miss MacQuillans from Bally Scuffling, an' in they all came to have their dresses tried on. An' Miss O'Trimmins kept me to hold the pins while she was fittin' them, for all her girls were that busy they could hardly stop to thread their needles. An' sich pinchin' an' serewin'! When they went away, I said to Miss O'Trimmins, 'I'm thankful,' says I, 'that none o' these gowns is for me.' An' she laughed, and says she, 'I wouldn't put it past you, Ailsie, to be right glad to go to the same ball if you got the chance.'

"I'm not so sure o' that," says I, 'but, as for chance, my name's MacQuillan as well as its theirs that were here this minute lookin' at me as if I was the dirt under their feet. An' put it to pride or not,' says I, 'but I do think, if I was fixed up grand, I could manage to cut as good a figure in a ball-room as e'er a wan o' them red-nosed things that are goin' to dress themself's up in all this fine grass-coloured satin!' It was very impident an' ill done o' me to make such a speech," said Ailsie, blushing at her confession, which had sent cousin Penny into fits of laughter, "but my blood was up, somehow, with the looks o' them old things from Bally Scuffling, an' I couldn't hold my tongue!"

"Go on, go on, Ailsie dear!" said Penny, wiping her eyes.

"Oh, then," said Ailsie, "she began talkin' the same kind o' stuff that they were botherin' me with the day through, axin' me why my father hadn't sent word to Lady Betty like the rest o' the MacQuillans, tellin' me we were the only wans o' the name that hadn't spoken. It's just the wan word in all their mouths. Mrs. Maginty, that buys my eggs, she was at it, an' ould Dan Carr, that takes my butter from me, I thought I'd never get him talked down, an' Nancy McDonnell that was sellin' sweeties in

the fair, an' Katty O'Neil that was goin' about with me all day, an' Mrs. McShane that I bought the tea from. Oeh! I couldn't remember the wan half o' them!"

"An what did you say to them, Ailsie dear?" asked Mary the mother, insinuatingly.

"Why," said Ailsie, "I tould them first, that all the rest o' the MacQuillans about were ladies an' gentlemen, an' would be creditable to Lady Betty when she made her choice, but that my father was a poor man that had nothin' to do with the comin's an' goin's o' genthry. But when that wouldn't do, I up an' tould them that he had too much feelin' for a lonely old woman comin' home without a friend in her ould age, to think o' beginnin' to worry her about what would be to divide afther her death, afore ever she set foot in the country. 'It's an ill welcome for all their fine talking,' said I, 'an' if they hadn't put her an' pestered her to it, she would never be for doin' the quare thing she's goin' to do on Wensday week night.' An' what do you think she is goin' to do, father?" said Ailsie, turning to Jamie, "but she's to have a big cake made, an' a ring in it, an every MacQuillan at the feast gets a piece o' the cake, an' whoever finds the ring, as sure as he's there he's the wan to share Lady Betty's fortune, an' come afther her in Castle Craigie!"

Here Mary the mother began to groan and rock herself, and complain of the obstinacy of people who would not stretch out their hands for a piece of that lucky cake, when it might be theirs for the asking. Jamie was getting very red in the face, and crumpling his paper very fiercely, when Penny, who had been laughing again, once more wiped her eyes, and taking her stick from the corner, prepared to depart.

"It's getting far in the day," she said, "an' I have a good bit further to go afore night, to see my old friend Madgey Mucklehern, that lives in the Windy Gap; good luck is hers she hasn't been blown out o' t' house an' all afore this! But I'll be back this way," she added; "don't you think ye've seen the last o' Penny McCambridge, cousin Jamie, for feth ye'll know more o' me shortly, if the Lord spares me my breath for a wheen more o' weeks."

And Penny McCambridge shook hands with her kinsfolk, and trotted away down the lonan, as she had come.

CHAPTER II.

It was only a few evenings after this that Ailsie was sitting on the end of the kitchen-table, reading the newspaper to her father.

"N a-na," said Ailsie, stumbling at a word, "v i-vi, g a-ga—Oeh, my blessin' to the word, I can't make head or tail o't. Ye'll read it better yersel', father; an' it's time I was goin' feedin' my hens, anyhow!"

"Ailsie," said Jamie, rubbing his spectacles, "I'm feared you'r turnin' out a bad clark afther all the trouble Mither Devnish has taken w' you. Ye'r gettin' a big woman, Ailsie, an' there's not a thing ye'r bad at but the clarkin'. Go off to school, now, this very evenin', an' give my

respects to Hughie Devnish, an' tell him to tache you how to spell navigation afore you come back."

Ailsie coloured, and her thick black lashes rested on her russet cheeks while she tucked up her gown and kneaded the wet meal for the hens with her gipsy hands. But as she left the house she looked back with a wicked little toss of her head.

"Then you an' Hughie Devnish may put it out o' yer heads that ye'll ever make a clark o' Ailsie," she said; "for if ye were to make a stew o' all the larin'-books that ever cracked a schoolmaster's skull, an' feed her on nothin' but that for the next ten years, ye wouldn't have her wan bit the larnder in the hinder end!"

So saying, she stepped out into the sun, and was busy feeding her hens under the shelter of the golden haycock, when she saw a servant in a showy livery coming riding up the lonan.

"Can you tell me where Miss MacQuillan lives about here, my good girl?" he asked, with a supercilious glance at Ailsie's wooden dish.

"No," said Ailsie, looking at him with her head thrown back. "That's Jamie MacQuillan's house"—pointing to the gable—"an' I'm his daughter Ailsie, but there's no Miss MacQuillan here; none nearer by this road nor Bally Scuffling."

"I beg your pardon, miss," said the man, with an altered manner, "but I believe this must be for you." And then he rode off, leaving her standing staring at a dainty pink note which she held by one corner between two mealy fingers. "Miss Ailsie MacQuillan," said the ink on the back of the narrow satin envelope.

"That's me!" said Ailsie with a gasp. "The rest o' them's all Lizabeths, an' Isabellas, an' Aramintys. An', as thrue as I'm a livin' girl, it's the Castle Craigie liveries yon fine fellow was dressed up so grand in, an' here's the Castle Craigie crest on this purty little seal."

It was a note of invitation to Lady Betty's ball, and, in spite of her bad "clarkin'," Ailsie was able to read it, spelling it out word after word, turning it back and forward and upside-down, and feeling sure all the time that somebody had played a trick on her by writing to Lady Betty in her name. She sat on a stone and made her reflections, with the sun all the while burning her cheeks, and making them more and more unfit to appear in a ball-room.

"An' she thinks I'm some fine young lady in a low neck an' satin shoes, waitin' all ready to step into her ball-room an' make her a curtsy. Good luck to her! What 'd she say if she hard Ailsie's brogues hammerin' away on yon fine slippy floor o' hers?" And Ailsie, as she spoke, extended one little roughshod foot and looked at it critically. "Then thank you, Lady Betty, but I'm not goin' to make mysel' a laughin'-stock for the country yet!"

"Who came ridin' up the lonan a bit ago, Ailsie?" said the mother, when she went in with the note safely hidden in her pocket.

"Ridin' up the lonan is it?" said Ailsie.

"Ay, ay," said Mary, "I thought I hard a

horse's fut on the road, but it be to been yer father snorin'?"

"Me snorin'!" cried Jamie, starting and rubbing his eyes. "Ye'r dhramin' yersel', Mary. Ailsie, ye witch, are ye not gone to school yet?"

"Well, I'll go now, father," said Ailsie. "Maybe," she thought, "Hughie 'll tell me what to do with that letter afore I come back."

A thatched house, with a row of small latticed windows blinking down at the sea in the strong sunset, with a grotesque thorn looking over the more distant gable, and an army of fierce holly-hocks mustering about the little entry-door. This was the school, and Mr. Hugh Devnish was at this moment standing at his desk writing "head-lines" in the copy-books of his pupils; a young man with a grave busy face, and one hand concealed in the breast of his coat. That hand was deformed, and so Hugh Devnish had been brought up to teach school, instead of to follow the plough. That such breeding had not been wasted, his face announced. Even the country people around held him in unusual respect, though he did not give them half as many long words, nor talk Latin to them, like his predecessor, Larry O'Mullan, who had died of hard study, poor boy! at the age of eighty-five.

Hughie glanced through the window before him, got suddenly red in the face, and cried "Attention!" in a voice which made all the lads and lasses look up from their copy-books. The next moment a gipsy-faced girl walked in, hung up her bonnet, and sat down on a form.

"What's your word, Ailsie MacQuillan?" asked the schoolmaster, taking her book with a severe and business-like air.

"Invitation, sir—navigation, I mane," said Ailsie, demurely, studying her folded hands.

The master looked at her sharply, and afterwards frowned severely, when, on going the rounds of the desks, he found "Lady Betty MacQuillan," "Castle Craigie," and other foolish and meaningless words, scrawled profanely over the page which was to have been sacred to navigation alone. Ailsie was "kept in" for bad conduct, and locked up alone in the school after the other pupils had gone home. And there, when the schoolmaster came to release her, she was found plucking the roses that hung in at the window, and sticking them in the holes for the ink-bottles along the desks. A crumpled note lay open before her.

We should hardly have said the schoolmaster came in, for, though it was Hughie Devnish, he appeared in a new character. This punished girl was his wildest and least creditable pupil, and yet, when he walked up to her in her disgrace, he was trembling and blushing like his own youngest "scholar" coming up for a whipping. His eye caught the crumpled note, and he picked it up and read it.

"I guessed how 'twas," he said, "but you're surely not thinkin' of goin'?"

Now Ailsie had intended to ask his advice, but the mischief that was in her would come out.

"Why should I not go as well as another?" she asked, pettishly.

"Aroon, you know I would not like it," he said.

"An' that's a reason, feth!" said Ailsie, tossing her head, and beginning to pick a rose to pieces.

"Ailsie," said the young man, vehemently, "it was only the other day you told me here that you could like me better than all the world, better than Ned Mucklehern, for all his fine land and his presents o' butther an' crame; better than Mehaffy the miller, that gave you the fine speckled hen; better than MacQuillan o' the Reek——"

"Bad manners to him!" struck in Ailsie, angrily, flinging a shower of rose-leaves from her hand over the desks.

"You promised to be my wife, Ailsie."

"It all come o' keepin' me in for bad conduct," said Ailsie, swinging one foot with provoking unconcern.

"No matter what it came of," said Hughie, "you promised me. And you promised me as well that you wouldn't go thrustin' yourself among these people, that would only laugh at you for your pains."

"I don't know why you should think I'd be laughed at," said Ailsie, "barrin' you're ashamed o' me!"

The schoolmaster's face blazed up, and with all his heart in his eyes he gazed at her where she sat with her ripe face half turned from the sun coming through the lattice, and her dark head framed in the roses.

"Ashamed o' you, mavourneen?" he said, tenderly. "No; but there might be some there that I wouldn't like you to come across, an' you alone an' unprotected. MacQuillan o' the Reek——"

"I slapped his face wanst!" cried Ailsie, firing up again, "an' it's not likely he'll come axin' me to do 't again."

"And there 'll be others there," he went on, "that 'd fall in love w' you maybe, an' snatch you up from Hughie before he has enough earned to marry you out o' hand."

"An' what if they did?" said Ailsie, with wicked coolness.

"What if they did?" repeated Devnish, slowly, looking at her with a pained appealing look, as if expecting her to retract the cruel words. "I tell you what it is, Ailsie," he broke out, passionately, drawing his left hand from its concealment, "I believe it's this that's workin' at the bottom o' all your coldness. You're tired already of a deformed lover. Go to Lady Betty's ball then, an' find a husband for yourself that you'll not be ashamed of. Go——"

Just as Ailsie was getting pale, and the tears coming into her eyes, a little door opened, and a good-humoured-looking country woman came into the schoolroom.

"Come in to your supper, Hughie," she said.

"Och, is it Ailsie MacQuillan in penance the night again? Girl alive! is it a love-letter you're showin' the master?"

"No, indeed, Mrs. Devnish," said Ailsie,

erecting her head; "it's a note of invitation from Lady Betty MacQuillan, axin' me to do her the honour of dancin' at her ball at Castle Craigie on Wensday come eight days."

"Oh, then, then! but you're the lucky girl," cried the Widow Devnish, clapping her hands over the note, while Hughie stalked away silently to a window by himself. "I declare it's as grand an' as beautiful as if it was written to the Queen. Asthore! an' has your mother any sense left at all, at all, with the dint o' the joy?"

"She didn't see it yet," stammered Ailsie, seeing now the scrape into which she had got herself through yielding to her reckless whim of tormenting her lover. "I got it just as I left home, an' she didn't see it yet."

"An' you're stan'in' up there as if nothin' had happened you, you ongrateful colleen," said the Widow Devnish, pocketing the note. "Wait a minute, then, till I get the cloak, an' it's myself 'll go home wi' you, an' help to tell the news."

CHAPTER III.

It was speedily settled between Mary MacQuillan and the Widow Devnish that Ailsie should go to the ball.

"I have a fine piece of yellow Chaney silk," said the Widow Devnish, "that Sailor Johnny sent me from beyont the says. It would make her a skirt, barrin' it wasn't too long, an' a hem o' somethin' else lined on behind."

"An' I've a ducky bit o' cherry tabinet," said Mary the mother, "that brother Pat, the weaver, sent me from Dublin to make a bonnet o'. It'll cut into a beautiful jockey for her, barrin' we don't make the sleeves too wide."

So on the eventful night Ailsie was dressed out in the yellow silk skirt and cherry-coloured bodice, with a fine pair of stockings of Mary's own knitting, with magnificent clocks up the sides. Her little bog-trotting brogues were polished till you could see yourself in the toes, and a pair of elegant black silk mittens covered her hands up to her little brown knuckles, stretching up past her wrists to make amends for the scantiness of her sleeves. Then, she had a grand pair of clanking earrings as long as your little finger, which the Widow Devnish had worn as a bride; and the two mothers, taking each a side of the victim's head, plaited her thick black hair into endless numbers of fanciful braids, which they rolled round the crown of her head, and into which they planted a tortoiseshell comb, curved like the back of an arm-chair, which Jamie's mother had worn at his christening, and which towered over Ailsie's head like Minerva's helmet put on the wrong way. Ned Mucklehern of the Windy Gap was to take her to Castle Craigie in his new spring cart; and two good hours before dark Ailsie was standing at the door, looking longingly for a glimpse of Hughie coming over the hill to see how handsome she looked in her strange finery. But Hughie did not appear, and vowing vengeance on him for his "sulks," Ailsie submitted to be packed up in the cart.

"But it's no use takin' the rue now," said she. "I be to go through with it!" And with desperate bravery she said good night to Ned Mucklehern, who, at her command, set her down at a little distance from the entrance gates, out and in of which the carriages were rolling at such a rate as made poor Ailsie's heart thump against her side till it was like to burst through Pat the weaver's tabinet.

She crept in through a little side-gate, and up the avenue, keeping as much as possible in shelter of the trees; but it was not quite dark yet, and the coachmen coming and going stared at her, taking her, maybe, for some masquerading gipsy or strolling actress whom Lady Betty had engaged to amuse the company. She arrived at the hall door just in time to see a flock of young ladies in white robes float gracefully over the threshold, and the absurdity of her own costume came before her in its terrible reality. Covered with confusion, she looked about to see if she could escape among the trees, and hide there till morning; but one of the grand servants had espied her, and under his eyes Ailsie scorned to beat a retreat.

"What is your business here, young woman?" asked this awful person, as she stepped into the glare of the hall lights.

"I am one of Lady Betty's guests," said Ailsie, lifting her head. But a horrible tittering greeted this announcement from a crowd of other servants, who were all eyeing her curiously from head to foot. Ailsie was ready to sink into the earth with shame and mortification, when, happily, the arrival of a fresh carriageful of guests diverted the general attention from herself, and she heard some one saying, "This way, miss." Glad to escape anywhere, she followed a servant whose face she could not see, but whose voice was wonderfully familiar. Passing through an inner hall, her hand was grasped by this person, and she was swiftly drawn into a pantry and the door shut.

"Oh, Hughie, Hughie!" cried Ailsie, bursting into tears, and clinging to his arm. "Then where did you dhrop from, anyways?"

"Whisht, avourneen!" said Hughie, "we haven't a minute to stay, for yon chaps 'll be runnin' in an' out here all night. But do you think Hughie could rest aisy at home an' you unprotected in this place? Wan o' the fellows was knocked up with all the wine that's goin', an' they were glad to give me his place, an' his clothes. Ye won't feel so lonesome."

"Oh, Hughie, I wisht I'd stayed at home as you bid me. An' your han', Hughie?"

"Och, never mind it, asthore. I'll only carry small thrays, and the wan hand 'll do beautiful. Come now, aroon." So, resuming his character of servant, Hughie squired his trembling lady-love up Lady Betty's gilded staircase.

The ball was held in an old-fashioned hall, whose roof was crossed with dark rafters, from which gloomy old banners were swinging. The door was partly open, and Ailsie peeped in.

"Oh, Hughie, Hughie!" she whispered, "take me back to the pantry! I'll lie close in

a cupboard, an' never stir a stir till morning."

"It couldn't be done, darlin'," whispered Hughie. "Ye must put a bold face on it, an' take your chance."

He opened the door wide, and Ailsie felt herself swallowed up in a blaze of light and colour, with a hum in her ears as of a thousand bees all buzzing round her head at once. When she recovered from her first stunned sensation, and regained consciousness of her own identity, she found herself seated side by side with the five Miss MacQuillans from Bally Scuffling, all dressed in their grass-coloured satin, all with their noses redder than ever, all eyeing her askance from her comb to her brogues, and tittering just as the servants had done in the hall.

A band was playing, and a crowd of people were dancing, but it seemed to Ailsie, whenever she looked up, that nobody had got anything to do but to stare at her. When she saw the elegant slippers of the dancers she was afraid to stir lest the "hammerin'" of her feet should be heard all over the room; and when MacQuillan of the Reek came up to her, and, making a low bow, begged the honour of dancing with her, Ailsie's ears began to sing with confusion, and her teeth to chatter with fright. But as she did not know how to refuse, she got up and accompanied him to where there was an empty space on the floor. The band was playing a lively tune as a quadrille, and Ailsie, thinking anything better than standing still, fell to dancing her familiar jig with energy. She had once slapped this gentleman's face for his impertinence, and she believed that he had now led her out to avenge himself by her confusion. So Ailsie danced her jig, and finding that the clatter of her brogues was drowned by the music, she gained courage and danced it with spirit, round and round her astonished partner, till the lookers-on cried "Brava!" and the laugh was turned against MacQuillan of the Reek, who was, after all, very glad when she made him her curtsy, and allowed him to take her back again to the Bally Scuffling maidens, who had not been dancing at all, and who held up their five fans before their five faces in disgust at Ailsie's performance.

A magic word, *supper*, acted like a charm on all there. The crowd thinned and disappeared, and nobody noticed Ailsie. Every gentleman had his own partner to attend to, and no one came near the little peasant girl. Ailsie was very glad, for she would rather endure hunger than be laughed at, and she was just beginning to nod asleep in her seat, when in came Hughie.

"I'm goin' to fetch you somethin' to ate, darlin'," he said, and hurried away again. And Ailsie was just beginning to nod asleep once more, when in came MacQuillan of the Reek, saying that Lady Betty had sent him to conduct her (Ailsie) to the supper-room.

Lady Betty was sitting at the head of the most distant table, with a knife in her hand, and a huge cake before her. The more substantial eatables seemed to have been already discussed,

for every guest had a slice of this cake on a plate before him or her. They were nibbling it, and mincing it up with knives. All were silent, and all looked anxious and dissatisfied. Ailsie thought the silence and the dissatisfaction was all on account of her audacious entrance.

"This way!" said Lady Betty MacQuillan, in a voice that made Ailsie start, and the august hostess cleared a place at her side for our blushing heroine. The wax-lights blazed on Lady Betty's golden turban, and Ailsie did not dare to look at her face. She sat down, and Lady Betty with her own hand helped her to a small cut of the wonderful cake. Ailsie was very hungry, and the cake was very good. She devoured a few morsels eagerly; then she ceased eating.

"Why don't you eat, child?" said Lady Betty, in a voice that again made Ailsie start; and this time she ventured to look up.

She looked up, and stared as if the clouds had opened above her head. There was a little withered yellow face, with twinkling black eyes, looking down on her—a face that she had seen before. It was Penny McCambridge, from Lough Neagh side, who was to have been her godmother only for the unfortunate pain in her heel, who was sitting there, dressed up in purple velvet and a cloth of gold turban. Oh, murder! What would be the end of this? Penny McCambridge befooling all the gentry folks of the country round, pretending to be the lady of Castle Craigie! Or, stay! Whether was Penny McCambridge acting Lady Betty MacQuillan, or had Lady Betty MacQuillan been acting Penny McCambridge?

"Why don't you eat, child?" repeated Lady Betty, as Ailsie sat turning her piece of cake about on her plate.

"I'm hungry enough," said Ailsie, "but I cannot ate this, my lady, barrin' you want me to choke myself!"

And Ailsie held up her bit of cake in which was wedged the ring that declared her the heiress of Castle Craigie.

Well, I need not tell how after supper some of the guests who were spiteful ordered their carriages and whirled away in disgust; how others, who were not spiteful, stayed and danced the morning in; how some, who were good natured, congratulated Ailsie on her good luck; how others, who were quite the reverse, yet fawned on the bewildered heroine of the evening. How Ailsie was kept close by the wonderful Lady Betty all the rest of the time; how she watched in vain for another glimpse of Hughie; how, in the end, she was conducted to a splendid bedchamber, where she was frightened out of her senses at the grandeur of the furniture, and could not get a wink of sleep for the softness of the stately bed.

The news was not long in travelling over the country, and next day, when a carriage dashed up to the foot of the lonan, Jamie and his wife thought they were prepared to receive their fortunate daughter with dignity. But when Ailsie walked in to them in a white pelisse and

sandalled slippers, her bonnie dark eyes looking out at them from under the shade of a pink satin hat and feathers, this delusion of theirs was dispelled. Mary's exultation knew no bounds, and Jamie said, "Can this fine lady be my daughter?" nervously, and with tears in his eyes. And Ailsie sat on a chair in the middle of the floor she had swept so often, and cried, and pulled off her fine hat, and threw it to the furthest corner of the kitchen, vowing she would never leave her father and mother to go and live with Lady Betty. And Lady Betty, who was present, was not a bit angry, although the beautiful hat was spoiled; but began telling how she would educate Ailsie, and take her to see the distant world, and how she would dress her like a princess, and marry her to some grand gentleman, who should either bear the name of MacQuillan, or adopt it.

But Ailsie only crying worse at this than before, she threw a purse of gold into Mary's lap, and began describing all the good things she would do for Jamie and his wife if Ailsie would only come with her; how she would build them a pretty house; how they should have servants to attend them, and horses and cows, and money at command. And Ailsie, listening to this, cried more violently than ever, with her swollen eyes staring through the door, out to the hill that led across to Hughie's. Then, when Lady Betty had done, Mary the mother began.

Ailsie took her eyes from the open door, and looked at her father. But Jamie, afraid to mar his child's brilliant prospects, only hung his head, and said never a word at all.

Then Ailsie's heart seemed to break with one loud sob. "I'll go feth!" cried she, "an' may God forgive ye all!" and rushed out of the cottage and down the lonan, bareheaded and weeping. Midway she stopped on the road, and, pulling off one of her pretty shoes, she flung it from her with all her might till it struck the trunk of a far tree growing on the hill that led to Hughie's.

"That's the slipper to you, for good luck, Hughie Devnish!" she said; "an' if ever I forget you to marry a fine gentleman, may the Lord turn my gran' gowns into rags again, an' the bit that I ate into sand in my mouth!"

So Ailsie said good-by to home. The next day Lady Betty and Miss MacQuillan departed from Castle Craigue for the Continent.

CHAPTER IV.

FOUR years passed away, and Jamie and Mary had grown accustomed to their improved circumstances, Lady Betty having proved as good as her word in bestowing on them all those benefits which she had enumerated when coaxing Ailsie away with her. Whether they were quite satisfied with the freak that fortune had played with them, they themselves knew best. When a neighbour went in to see them, Mary had always some grand talk about "my daughter, Miss MacQuillan;" but the Widow Devnish often shook her head, saying they were dull enough when nobody was by, and feared Ailsie had forgotten them.

Ned Mucklehern and Mehaffy the miller had each consoled himself with a wife long ago. Hughie Devnish still taught his school, and his mother still called him in to his supper of evenings; but he was not the same Hughie, the widow vowed, never since the night of Lady Betty's ball, when he had taken the strange whim of going serving at the castle. That some one had put a charm on him that night, from the effects of which he had never recovered, was the Widow Devnish's firm belief. He was "as grave as a judge," she said, from morning till night, all wrapped up in the improvement of his school, never would go to a dance or a fair like other young men, and, say what she might to him, would admit no thought of taking a wife, though his means would allow of it now, since he had got some tuitions among the gentry-folks of the neighbourhood. The Widow Devnish was very proud of her son, but she was sorely afraid there was "something on him." For, strangest of all, once when she came into his schoolroom at dusk unnoticed, she saw him looking at a little kid shoe, with long silken sandals hanging from it. "She'll forget," he was saying, as he turned it about, and wound the sandals round it, "of course, of course she'll forget."

All this time, while things had been going on so with these vulgar and insignificant folks at home, neither Ailsie nor Lady Betty had been seen at Castle Craigue. Lady Betty surrounded her protégée with French, Italian, drawing, and music, masters. But with these had Ailsie concerned herself but little. "Hughie Devnish could never tache me," she would say, coolly, when they were ready to wring their hands with vexation, "an' I don't think it's likely ye're any cleverer than him." However, there were some things that Ailsie did learn in time. Being observant and imitative, she acquired a habit of speaking tolerable French, and when talking English she modified, though she did not by any means give up, her brogue. She very soon learnt to flit a fan, to carry her handsome gowns with ease, and to develop certain original graces of manner which were considered by many to be very charming in the pretty heiress of Lady Betty's Indian thousands. Altogether, the patroness found herself obliged to be content, though the young lady could read neither French nor Italian, nor yet could she play on the spinnet or guitar.

Ailsie's education being thus finished, Lady Betty set her heart on an ambitious marriage for her favourite. She introduced her to society in Paris, and saw her making conquests right and left at the most fashionable watering-places on the Continent. Ailsie's sparkling eyes were enchantingly foiled by her diamonds, and proposals in plenty were laid at her feet. But Ailsie, though enjoying right merrily the homage so freely paid her, only laughed at the offers of marriage, as though it were quite impossible to regard them as anything but so many very capital jokes. Lady Betty did not join in this view of the matter, but she had patience with her heiress for a considerable time, as Ailsie always mollified her displeasure by saying, on her

refusal of each "good match," "I will marry a better man still, Lady Betty."

After four years, Lady Betty, who was a wilful old lady, and whose patience was exhausted, quarrelled with her about it, and before she recovered her temper she took ill and died, and Ailsie found herself one day sad and solitary in Paris, without the protection of her kind indulgent friend.

Tears would not mend the matter now, nor would they alter the will which Lady Betty had left behind her, the conditions of which were fair enough, said Ailsie's suitors, when the contents of the important document became known. One year had the impatient old lady given her chosen heiress, in the space of which time to become a wife. And if at the end of that year she was still found to be a spinster, not a penny had she, but might go back to the cottage at the top of the lonan, and take with her her father and mother to work for them as before, to milk her cows, and feed her hens, and persuade herself, if she liked, that her wit, and her diamonds, and her beauty, and her lovers, had all had their existence in a tantalizing dream, which had visited her between roosting-time in the evening and cock-crow of a churning morning. But, should she marry before the year was out, bestowing on her husband the name of MacQuillan, then would the shade of Lady Betty be appeased, and the Indian thousands and the Irish rentals, together with the old ancestral halls of Castle Craigie, would all belong to Ailsie and the fortunate possessor of her wealthy little hand.

Very fair conditions, said the suitors, and proposals poured in on Ailsie. But lo and behold! the flinty-hearted damsel proved as obstinate as ever; and, in the midst of wonderment and disappointment, having attained the age of twenty-one, and being altogether her own mistress, she wrote to her retainers at Castle Craigie to announce her arrival there upon a certain summer day. Great was the glory of Mary MacQuillan when she received a letter from her daughter, desiring that her father and mother should at once take up their abode at the castle, being there to receive her at her arrival. Great, indeed, was her triumph when Miss O'Trimmins sat making her a gown of brown velvet, and a lace cap with lappets, in which to meet her child, and when Jamie's blue coat with the bright gold buttons came home.

Ailsie brought a whole horde of foreigners with her, brilliant ladies of rank, who called her pet and darling in broken English—and needy marquises—and counts with slender means, who were nevertheless very magnificent persons, and still hoped to win the Irish charmer. Balls, plays, and sports of all kinds went on at the Castle, and those of the gentry-folks who, from curiosity, or a better feeling, came to visit Ailsie, found her in the midst of a roomful of glittering company, dressed in a blue satin sacque and pearl earrings, with her hair coming into her eyes in very bewitching little tendrils, and seated between Mary in the brown velvet and lappets, and Jamie in the

new coat with the buttons. They went away saying she was wonderful indeed, considering, delightfully odd and pretty, and they wondered which of those flaunting foreigners she was going to marry in the end. Meantime the year was flying away, and old neighbours of her mother's began to shake their heads over the fire, of nights, and to say that if Ailsie did not take care, she might be a penniless lass yet.

Things were in this position, when, one fine morning, Miss MacQuillan driving out with some of her grand friends, thought proper to stop at the door of Hughie Devnish's school-house. The schoolmaster turned red and then pale as he saw Ailsie's feathers coming nodding in to him through the doorway, followed by a brilliant party of grandes, and two footmen dragging a huge parcel of presents for his girls and boys. Ailsie coolly set her ladies and gentlemen unpacking the parcel and distributing its contents, whilst she questioned the schoolmaster upon many subjects with the air of a little duchess, whose humour it was to make inquiries, and who never, certainly, had seen that place, much less conversed with that person before.

Hughie endured her whim with proud patience, till, just before she left him, on opening his desk to restore a book to its place, she demanded to see a certain little dark thing which was peeping out from under some papers. Then, with evident annoyance, he produced a little black kid shoe. So the story runs.

"Why, it's only a slipper!" said Ailsie, turning it about and looking at it just as the Widow Devnish had detected Hughie in doing. "What an odd thing to keep a shoe in a desk! But it looked like the cover of a book. Good morning."

As the party drove off, it is said that one of the gentlemen remarked that the schoolmaster was a fine-looking intelligent fellow, fit for a better station than that which he filled. And it is further said that next day Ailsie made a present to this gentleman of a snuff-box worth a hundred guineas.

When Ailsie went to her room on her return home on this August afternoon, she walked over to a handsome gold casket which stood upon her table, unlocked it, and took out a little kid slipper which looked as if she must have stolen it out of Hughie's desk. In the sole of it was pinned a slip of paper, on which were scrawled, in a crude hand, the words:

"If ever I forget you, Hughie Devnish, to marry a fine gentleman, may the Lord turn my gran' gowns into Rags agen, and the bit that I ate into Sand in my mouth."

"And the Lord's goin' to do it very fast," said Ailsie, falling back into her old way of talking, as she looked at this specimen of her old way of writing, "if I do not look to 't very soon, an' be keepin' my word! An' God knows, Hughie Devnish," she added, as she locked her box again with a sharp snap, "you're more of a gentleman any day the sun rises on you, than ever poor Ailsie'll be of a lady!"

And I am given to understand that shortly after this, the lady of the castle sent a message to her guests to say she was indisposed (Ailsie had picked up a few pretty words), from the heat, and must beg them to excuse her absence from amongst them for the rest of the day.

It was on this very evening that Hughie Devnish was walking up and down his school-room floor, musing, I am told, on the impossibility of his enduring in the future to have Ailsie coming into his school at any hour she pleased, to play the mischief with his feelings, and the lady patroness amongst his boys and girls. He had just come to the point of resolving to give up his labours here; and to go off to seek his fortune in America, when click! went the latch of the door, and (of course, thinks he, it must be a dream), in walked Ailsie. Not the Lady Bountiful of the morning, in satin gown and nodding feathers, but the veritable old Ailsie of four years ago, in the same old garb, cotton dress, brogues, straw bonnet tipped over her nose, and all (where on earth did she get them?) in which she had tripped in to him on that other August evening, of which this was the anniversary, when she had shown him her invitation to Lady Betty's ball.

Now, the gloaming was just putting out the glare of the sunset behind the latticed windows, and when Hughie had pinched himself and found that he was not dreaming at all, he next became very sure that he had gone out of his senses with trouble, and that he was looking at an object conjured up before his eyes by his own diseased imagination. However, the apparition looked very substantial as it approached, and sitting down on the end of one of the forms, it displayed a paper which it unfolded in its hands—hands that were white instead of brown, making the only difference between this and the old Ailsie.

"I've got a letther here, Misther Devnish," said Ailsie's old voice, speaking with Ailsie's old brogue, and in the sly mischievous tone that Hughie remembered well: "an', if ye plase, I want ye to answer it for me. I'm a bad clark myself, ye know."

Not knowing what to say to her, he took the letter out of her hand and glanced over it. It was a proposal of marriage from Ailsie's old tormentor, MacQuillan of the Reek.

The schoolmaster was trembling, you may believe, with many confused ideas and sensations when he folded the letter and returned it; but he inked his pen manfully, and produced a sheet of paper, then sat waiting with much patience for his visitor's dictation. But Ailsie sat quiet with her eyes upon the floor, and so there was a cruel pause.

"Well?" says Hughie, at last, with a bewitched feeling, as if he were addressing only

his pupil of old days, "what am I to say in the answer?"

"Feth I don't know," says Ailsie.

"But what reply do you mean to give?" asked Hughie, striving, we are assured, to command himself. "Am I to say yes or no in the letter?"

"I tell ye I don't know, Hughie Devnish," said Ailsie, crossly. "I gave a promise to another, an' he never has freed me from it yet. I b'lieve ye'll know best what to put in the letther yersel'."

"Ailsie!" cried Hughie, rising to his feet, "did you come here for nothing but to dhrive me mad? Or, avourneen, is it possible you would marry me yet?"

"Feth it is, Hughie," said Ailsie.

And after the letter was written they went in and had tea with the Widow Devnish.

The next morning Miss MacQuillan appeared amongst her guests as if nothing had happened, but before night a whisper flew from ear to ear that the heiress was engaged; while the lady herself did not contradict the report. Every man looked darkly at his neighbour, and "Who is he?" was the question on every lip. At last "It is not I," said one noble drone, and flew off to seek honey elsewhere; and "It is not I," said the others, one by one, and followed his example; and by-and-by Ailsie was left peacefully in possession of her castle; whereupon there was a quiet wedding, at which Mary, Jamie, and the Widow Devnish were the only guests.

A nine days' wonder expires on the tenth, and after a few years Hugh Devnish MacQuillan, Esq., was looked upon as no despicable person by many who thought it their duty to sneer on his wedding-day.

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